

# Detroit Free Press

## Macomb County finding ways to cut costs for future budgets

*Hackel: "Today, it's bottom line -- dollars and cents. If it's the cheapest, that's where we're going."*

**BY CHRISTINA HALL - DETROIT FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER - Aug 11, 2011**

Three hot meals and a cot won't be the norm at the Macomb County Jail in the future.

Instead, inmates will be served two hot meals and one cold one -- but they'll still have a cot to sleep on -- under a new food service and commissary contract that Sheriff Anthony Wickersham said is expected to save the county about \$187,000 each of the next two years.

His office also is expected to switch medical carriers with the goal of saving money during the length of the new two-year contract.

The efforts are some of the ways county departments and offices are trying to cut costs as Executive Mark Hackel's staff works on a two-year budget.

Last month, commissioners were presented with recommended budgets for special revenue and enterprise budgets for fiscal years ending Sept. 30, 2012 and Sept. 30, 2013.

The proposed budgets -- which Finance Director Peter Provenzano said may be further tightened -- are near or just over \$370 million each fiscal year. One of the biggest eye-catchers is the more than \$8 million the road department plans to pull each year from its fund balance for road repairs.

Hackel said officials may centralize dispatching facilities for emergency management, roads and the sheriff's office to save money. They're also considering selling or leasing buildings, vacant space and sites such as the former Bank Nightlife nightclub next to the county administration building that the county owns.

The general operating fund budget is about \$198 million with a \$9.2-million shortfall -- a figure that officials said may be further reduced this year. The county started the year with a \$13.5-million shortfall.

Provenzano didn't have general operating fund budgets for 2012 or 2013. The county was facing double-digit deficits but, he said, "we are looking to pare that down quite a bit." He hesitated to say how much the projected deficit -- which next year was estimated at \$25 million -- would be reduced. He did not believe the deficit would be eliminated. "The more we save department-wise, the less we rely on concessions from employees or future layoffs," Provenzano said.

Wickersham said switching food service providers would be a better deal for the county. The change could take effect next month. Under the new contract, food costs are to be at least eight cents less per meal per inmate and the county is expected to receive a higher percentage back on commissary sales, such as snacks and personal hygiene items, Wickersham said. He said the change will help save positions and keep officers on the road.

"Today, it's bottom line -- dollars and cents," Hackel said. "If it's the cheapest, that's where we're going."

The new medical carrier contract is projected to cost \$6.2 million versus the just under \$6.1-million bid from the current carrier, Wickersham said. However, he said the new company is to offer monitoring of expenses and claims to insurance companies so the jail is not overcharged. The company offers a pricing guarantee if it hits the \$6.2-million figure. There also is to be a carrier network picking up some costs, bringing additional savings, he said.

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